

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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STATEMENT OF UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT POSITION ON FOREIGN FORCES IN LAOS

The US Government continues to support the 1962 Geneva Agreements on Laos and believes that their full implementation would lead to not only the solution of the Lao problem but also to a general reduction in the level of violence on the entire peninsula. Since it is generally held that these Agreements are now being violated, the President of the United States in 1970 wrote to the Heads of Government of all the signatories urging them to support the efforts of the Lao Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma, to promote consultations among the signatories as is provided for in Article IV of the Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos in cases of violation of the Agreements. The response was disappointing: some governments did not even respond to this appeal. Subsequently in his October 7, 1970, peace proposal, the President urged an Indo-China conference which would address the problems of the conflict in Laos and Cambodia as well as in Viet-Nam. To date North Viet-Nam has refused to join us in this effort to bring peace to that troubled peninsula.

The root cause of the current problems in Indo-China is the presence beyond the borders of North Viet-Nam of some 250,000 North Vietnamese troops. In the case of Laos, while the United States withdrew its entire military advisory group of 666 men following the signing of the Geneva Agreements in 1962, the North Vietnamese withdrew only 40 personnel through the ICC check points. Although some of the 10,000 North Vietnamese military then in Laos were apparently withdrawn, many stayed. Over the years the number has grown, and some 80,000 North Vietnamese forces are not only directed against the neutral government of Laos, but also use the territory of Laos, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, to intervene in the internal affairs of a neighboring state, the Republic of Viet-Nam. Such use of Lao territory is in itself also a violation of the 1962 Geneva Agreements. It was in response to this continuing threat that the Republic of Viet-Nam mounted an operation in Laos and northern South Viet-Nam in March and April of 1971 to disrupt the North Vietnamese use of the Trail. The Royal Lao Government, while expressing regret for the South Vietnamese action, noted that "... primary responsibility for this development rests on the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam which has violated international law and the 1962 Geneva Agreements. The Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam has violated and is continuing to violate the neutrality and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Laos."

More recently there has been controversy over reports of what have been called "Thai troops" in Laos. Both the Lao and Thai Governments have denied that there are Thai Government troops in Laos. The Thai

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Government has stated that there are volunteers of Thai nationality in irregular forces in Laos. These volunteers, many of them from areas bordering on Laos and ethnically indistinguishable from the Lao, have enrolled in the Lao military services in response to appeals from the Royal Lao Government. These volunteers and the military organizations to which they belong are part of the RLG armed forces and are under the command of the Royal Lao Government, through the Lao Military Region commanders.

On June 7 the Department of State spokesman acknowledged that the U. S. Government provided support to these volunteers and to others forces, regular and irregular, in Laos.

The Royal Thai Government has acknowledged that it has provided training for Lao forces, regular and irregular, on Thai soil, acting in response to a request from the Royal Lao Government. The Thai Government's willingness to provide this kind of assistance stems from the extreme importance of Laos to Thai security.

The Royal Lao Government is sensitive to implications with respect to the Geneva Agreements created by the presence of volunteers of Thai nationality in Laos. However, in the face of the massive North Vietnamese invasion, the RLG felt constrained to seek reinforcements for the severely depleted Lao forces. It considers that it is fully justified in seeking such assistance. The DRV's violations constitute a material breach of the Agreements which entitle--and indeed impel--the RLG to take necessary measures to defend itself. Likewise the USG, itself a signatory of these Agreements, is entitled to withhold complete compliance in light of this failure by the DRV to honor its obligations, and it is justified in responding to requests for assistance from the RLG. The Lao Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma, has made it clear on many occasions that he is prepared to return to full implementation of the Geneva Agreements whenever the DRV is prepared to do likewise, beginning by the withdrawal of all its military forces from Laos. The USG fully supports this position of the Lao Prime Minister.

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